

Washington, D.C. - U.S. Rep. Mark Kirk (R-III.) joined Reps. Rahm Emanuel (D-IL) and Tom Reynolds (R-NY) introducing bipartisan legislation to stop invasive species from entering the Great Lakes. The *"Great Lakes Invasive Species Control Act"* (H.R. 4771), requires all vessels equipped with ballast water tanks, including those not carrying ballast water, to flush and clean their tanks before entering the Great Lakes.

"Contaminated ballast tanks are responsible for releasing invasive species like the 1998 dumping of the fish hook flea into the Great Lakes," Congressman Kirk said. "Whether these tanks are filled with ballast water, or only contain contaminated residue, they need to be cleaned to remove threats to our Great Lakes ecosystem."

"Protecting our precious water resources like the Great Lakes is vital to our environment as well as our economy," stated Congressman Thomas M. Reynolds. "This bill will protect our Great Lakes from invasive species often found in ballast water. I look forward to working with my colleagues in advancing this bill, and protecting our great national treasures of the Great Lakes."

Currently, only vessels actually carrying ballast water are required to flush their tanks before entering the Great Lakes. By flushing all ballast tanks with sea water, the Coast Guard would reduce the threat of invasive species threat by 90 percent. Currently, most vessels that enter the Great Lakes have no "ballast on board" -- meaning their tanks are largely empty but still may have contaminated residue -- and enter the Great Lakes without cleaning their tanks. The legislation offered by Reps. Kirk, Emanuel and Reynolds sets a six-month deadline for the Secretary of Homeland Security and the Coast Guard to issue regulations on the flushing of all vessel ballast tanks before entering the Great Lakes.

"For this legislation to quickly pass the Congress, it needs to be bipartisan. I want to thank the other Democratic representatives, led by Congressman Rahm Emanuel, to pass this reform. We are dedicated to bipartisan action to protect the Great Lakes," Congressman Kirk said.

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